

June 2021

Education/Economic Mobility Survey Summary

Produced by [Langer Research Associates](#)

The following is a summary of random-sample U.S. survey research on K-12 and post-secondary education and economic mobility released from mid-May to late June 2021. This project is supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

Key Takeaways

Education

One in six parents does not plan to send their child to school in person in the fall or is unsure about it – a fresh uncertainty as schools contemplate their reopening strategies and educators plan to help transition students to a more normal school environment.

COVID-19 concerns are parents' most-cited reason for preferring remote instruction. And a third of K-12 principals plan to accommodate parents' requests for remote learning – even though those in schools that were fully remote the past year rate their students' educational attainment lower than those whose schools offered hybrid or fully in-person models.

Vaccines may play a key role in getting students back to class in person. But despite FDA authorization of a coronavirus vaccine for use in adolescents, recent surveys find that uptake intention among parents remains relatively low. (Results vary depending both on the child's age and the way the question is posed.)

In other surveys released since mid-May, Americans divide on a variety of school reopening policies for the fall, including the question of vaccine mandates, masking and distancing requirements.

Economic Mobility

A weekly measure of consumer sentiment is its best since the pandemic began, with a sign of a more broadly based recovery: Americans' ratings of their personal finances rose in the past month exclusively among those with annual household incomes less than \$50,000.

Things are looking up, as well, specifically for teens: Just one in 10 teens who were available and searching for work was unemployed in May 2021, compared with three in 10 a year ago.

One newly released study marks the role of education in economic well-being, while another shows how the financial benefits of education accrue more strongly to those with a family history of college attendance. On public policy, a survey finds 61 percent support for expanding

access to health care and childcare and providing paid leave and college tuition support. Another finds broad support for federal action on healthcare affordability.

Detailed results follow.

K-12 Education

Overall satisfaction with schools is broad but not deep. In late May, 69 percent of registered voters were very or somewhat satisfied with the school experience being provided to children in their community; that included just 22 percent very satisfied. Sixteen percent were somewhat dissatisfied, 11 percent very dissatisfied. Results were similar among parents.

Among groups, satisfaction was higher among Black and Hispanic people (78 and 76 percent, respectively) than among whites (66 percent). And it was higher among Democrats (77 percent) than among Republicans (64 percent) or independents (61 percent). ([Fox News 5/22-5/25](#))

Learning Modes

In a recently released study conducted in March, 34 percent of K-12 principals planned to offer remote instruction to any student whose family requested it, even after the pandemic has passed. Thirty percent said they would offer one or more stand-alone online classes; 25 percent, classes with a combination of remote and in-person instruction; and 13 percent, classes with concurrent remote and in-person instruction.

That's the case even though principals at fully remote K-12 schools were much more apt to rate student achievement as subpar. Among principals at fully remote schools, about three-quarters said average achievement was below grade level for math in 2020-2021, vs. 46 percent at fully in-person schools. Those with a hybrid model fell in between, 63 percent. Divisions were similar, albeit narrower, for estimates of achievement in English language arts. ([RAND 3/22-3/26](#))

In another measure of disparities by instructional model, in newly released data from November, six in 10 parents with children taking at least one K-12 class online disagreed that their child was learning just as much as they would if taking classes in person. Twenty-two percent agreed. (Nineteen percent didn't take a position.) ([Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System 11/13-11/30](#))

One possible factor: Many teachers felt unprepared for the pivot to remote teaching. In newly released data collected last winter, nearly half of those who taught remotely in the 2020-2021 school term disagreed that their school or district provided adequate training in remote instruction. Nineteen percent disagreed strongly, 27 percent somewhat. ([RAND 1/19-2/15](#))

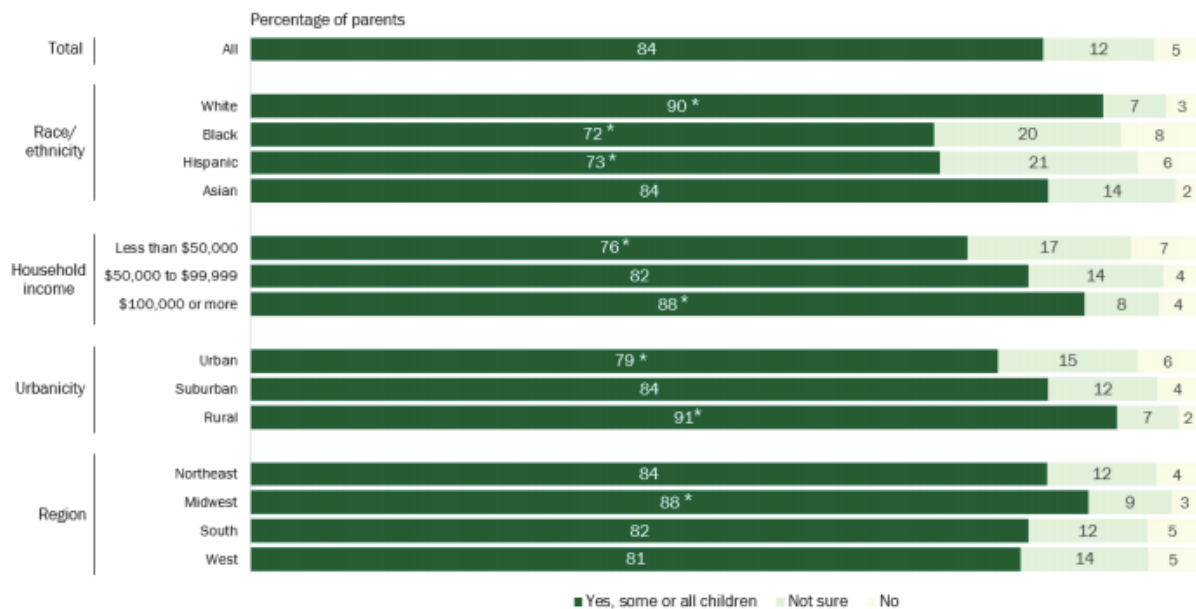
Next Steps for Schools

Half of registered voters in late May said their local public schools should reopen fully in person as usual at the start of the next school year. An additional 27 percent favored reopening in person with social distancing and masks. Two in 10 preferred combining in-person and remote learning.

Results among parents and non-parents were similar overall, but there was a gender gap among parents. Mothers were more apt than fathers to prefer a hybrid model (24 vs. 10 percent) while fathers were more likely to think schools should fully reopen (59 vs. 42 percent). ([Fox News 5/22-5/25](#))

An early May poll found some back-to-school hesitancy among parents. Twelve percent were unsure about sending their child back to school in the fall and an additional 5 percent did not plan to do so. (The results do not include parents whose children customarily are homeschooled or in virtual school.)

Figure 1. Percentage of parents who do and do not plan to send their children to school in-person in fall 2021



There were differences by race and ethnicity. Nine in 10 white parents planned to send their child to in-person school in the fall, compared with 73 percent of Hispanic parents and 72 percent of Black parents. Black and Hispanic parents were more apt to be unsure, 20 and 21 percent, vs. 7 percent of whites. Gaps also arose by household income and urbanicity, with higher-income and rural parents more apt than lower-income and urban parents to say they'd send their child back to in-person classes.

Among parents who did not plan to send their children back to school, COVID-19 concerns were the most frequently cited reasons. Three in 10 called concerns about their child transmitting the coronavirus a reason and a quarter cited fears about contracting COVID-19. Three in 10 also said their child feels safer attending school remotely. (COVID concerns were not specified in this item.) ([RAND 4/30-5/11](#))

In another measure of parent worries, 69 percent in late May were very or somewhat concerned about unvaccinated students and teachers not wearing masks in the upcoming school year. About

seven in 10 also were concerned about two other items: schools mandating vaccinations for students and teachers’ unions making it difficult to fully return to the classroom. ([Fox News 5/22-5/25](#), among registered voters)

Pre-K-12 parents broadly back incorporating technology-based practices if schools and students are back to full-time in-person attendance in the school year ahead. In mid-April to late May data, about eight in 10 supported remote tutoring and remote parent-teacher conferences. About three-quarters thought students should be able to communicate with their teachers electronically; said schools should use online platforms to store, organize and distribute class materials; and favored a pivot to remote learning when schools need to be closed for weather or any other reason. Many also said students should be able to submit assignments online (63 percent) and more reading materials should be available online (59 percent).

Sixty-four percent supported allowing students to repeat their 2020-2021 grade level. Far fewer supported the use of pass/fail rather than letter grades (29 percent), a longer school year and shorter summer vacation (23 percent apiece), longer school days (19 percent) or promoting students even if they don’t meet the requirements (15 percent). ([The74](#); [USC UAS 4/14-5/25](#))

Coronavirus Vaccination

One key factor in reopening K-12 education this fall may be the extent to which students have been vaccinated against the coronavirus. Recent surveys find that parents’ vaccine uptake intentions for their children are age related, but estimates also vary depending on how the question is posed.

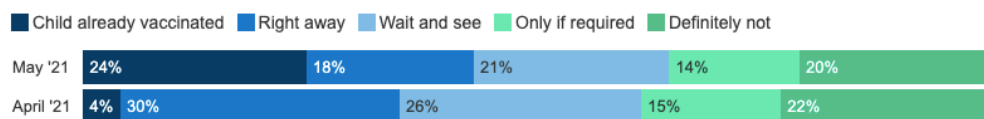
In one result, 53 percent of parents of children younger than 18 said their child had received a vaccine or was at least somewhat likely to do so, while 45 percent were not very or not at all likely to get it ([Axios-Ipsos 6/4-6/7](#)). Similarly, in late May, 53 percent of parents of children 15 or younger said they’d had their children vaccinated or planned to do so. It was 59 percent among parents of 16- to 18-year-olds. ([Gallup 5/18-5/23](#))

Another late May study found an even split among parents of children 15 and younger: Forty-five percent said their child had been vaccinated (3 percent) or would be once eligible (42 percent), while 44 percent did not plan to have their child vaccinated. Twelve percent were unsure. ([Quinnipiac 5/18-5/24](#))

Vaccine uptake intention is lower still when parents are given additional response options. In a late May survey just 41 percent of parents of 12- to 17-year-olds said they had received at least one dose of a vaccine (24 percent) or would

Four In Ten Parents Say Their Adolescent Has Already Received A COVID-19 Vaccine Or Will Do So Right Away

As you may know, the FDA recently authorized the use of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine for use in children ages 12 and up. Thinking about your child or children between the ages of 12-17, do you think you will...?



NOTE: Among parents or guardians of children ages 12-17. April 2021 question wording: "Once there is a COVID-19 vaccine authorized and available for your child's age group, do you think you will...?" See topline for full question wording.

SOURCE: KFF COVID-19 Vaccine Monitor (May 18-25, 2021) • [Download PNG](#)

[KFF COVID-19 Vaccine Monitor](#)

right away (18 percent). The rest, 55 percent, expressed hesitancy: Twenty-one percent were waiting to see how it was working, 14 percent said they would get their child vaccinated only if their school required it and 20 percent rejected it outright.

As for children younger than 12, just 26 percent of parents were inclined to get their child vaccinated right away (once authorized and available). A third planned to wait, 14 percent said they'd act only if mandated by their school and 26 percent ruled it out. ([KFF 5/18-5/25](#))

Among all adults, 56 percent favor requiring vaccines for high school students to return to class in the fall; it's more like half, 51 percent, for a middle school mandate. It's higher, 61 percent, for a vaccination requirement at colleges. ([Gallup 5/18-5/23](#))

Critical Race Theory and Juneteenth

On another subject, a quarter of registered voters favor teaching critical race theory in public schools, while a third are opposed; four in 10 "haven't heard enough to say." Support rises to 35 percent among parents, with 28 percent opposed.

Support peaks among Black registered voters (49 percent), liberals (48 percent) and Democrats (46 percent), while opposition is highest among Republicans (55 percent), conservatives (53 percent) and white men (40 percent).

Overall, half of registered voters say they're familiar with the theory (19 percent extremely familiar, 30 percent very), while 41 percent are unfamiliar with it (28 percent not very familiar, 13 percent not at all). (An additional 8 percent have never heard of it and 2 percent couldn't say.) Among those who report being familiar with critical race theory, 37 percent favor and 43 percent oppose teaching it in public schools, with 19 percent saying they haven't heard enough to say. ([Fox News June 19-22](#))

In a state-specific result, 56 percent of Iowans oppose a measure passed by the state Legislature this year that "bans teaching of certain concepts, including that the U.S. or state of Iowa is fundamentally or systematically racist or sexist." Thirty-four percent are in favor of this measure; the rest, 10 percent, are unsure. ([Des Moines Register/Mediacom 6/13-6/16](#))

Several other surveys on critical race theory are based on nonprobability or convenience samples, and as such do not support inference to a broader population.

Separately, Americans supported adding Juneteenth to public schools' history curriculum by a 3-1 margin, 49 vs. 16 percent, in a question asked prior to it becoming a national holiday. Thirty-five percent were unsure or unfamiliar with Juneteenth. ([Gallup 5/18-5/23](#))

Post-secondary Success

The pandemic continues to impact post-secondary education plans. Nationally, in early June, 41 percent of households with an adult who'd planned to take post-secondary classes this term said those plans had been cancelled; an additional 36 percent reported fewer classes taken, while just

10 percent reported more classes taken. Few reported that alternatives were pursued - classes taken in different formats (12 percent) or taken from a different institution or for a different kind of certificate or degree (2 percent apiece). ([Census Household Pulse Survey 5/26-6/7](#))

Two-thirds of students enrolled in higher education who have taken an online class since March 2020 agreed that they had access to their teachers (in November data, recently released). Outcomes on other items were considerably weaker, however:

- Fifty-nine percent disagreed with feeling connected to students and peers at their school; 17 percent agreed.
- Forty-three percent disagreed that they’re learning just as much as they would taking classes in person; 34 percent agreed.
- Four in 10 disagreed that online learning is worth the cost; three in 10 agreed. ([Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System 11/13-11/30](#))

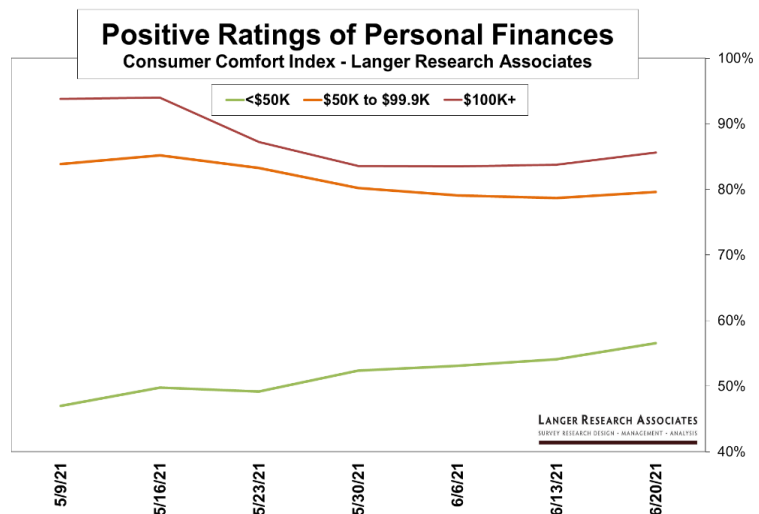
New York. On the subject of coronavirus vaccines, a survey in mid-May found that New York registered voters by 62-32 percent supported requiring college students in the state to receive COVID-19 vaccines as a condition of attendance, as proposed by a measure introduced in the State Legislature. (That’s similar to 61 percent support among all adults nationally, mentioned above.)

Views were highly partisan: 79 percent of New York Democrats were in favor, compared with 43 percent of Republicans and 45 percent of others. Support also was higher among voters age 55 and older (70 percent) and residents of New York City (68 percent), compared with those counterparts younger than 35 (58 percent) and upstate (56 percent). ([Siena 5/16-5/20](#))

Economic Mobility

Financial Situation

In a hint of improving opportunities for less well-off adults, Americans’ ratings of their personal finances rose in June, with the gain coming exclusively among those with annual household incomes less than \$50,000. Fifty-seven percent in this income bracket now rate their own finances as excellent or good, up from 47 percent in early May. These ratings remain far higher among people in higher-income households, but lost ground in the same period. ([Consumer Comfort Index 4/13-5/9, 5/25-6/20](#))



In another study, in May, 44 percent thought their personal finances will get better in the next year, holding steady from the previous month at 7 points below its pre-pandemic level ([Fannie Mae National Housing Survey 5/1-5/25](#)).

Asked another way, a quarter overall say they're struggling to remain where they are financially, while 14 percent say their financial situation is improving and 58 percent say it's basically stable. Those with incomes less than \$50,000 are twice as likely as those in the \$50,000-\$100,000 bracket to be struggling, and four times as apt as those in the top income group. ([Monmouth 6/9-6/14](#))

A related question points to improvement: The share who say they're falling behind financially is down 5 points since August to 27 percent. Fifty-six percent say their situation is steady, up 6 points in the same period; 17 percent are getting ahead, essentially unchanged. ([Fox News 6/19-6/22](#))

Thirteen percent report their household income is significantly lower than a year ago, the fewest since March 2020. Three in 10 report significantly higher incomes, up 8 points in a month to a pandemic high ([Fannie Mae National Housing Survey 5/1-5/25](#)). In a related measure, 13 percent expect someone in their household to have a loss in employment income in the next four weeks, also a pandemic low in data since April 2020 ([Census Household Pulse Survey 5/26-6/7](#)).

Recently released data from November underscore the role of education and race/ethnicity in economic well-being. Eighty-nine percent of those with a bachelor's degree or more said they were doing at least OK financially, dropping to 72 percent of those with some college or an associate's degree, 67 percent of those with a high school diploma/GED and just 45 percent of those with less than a high school diploma. Asian (84 percent) and white adults (80 percent) were substantially more likely than Hispanic and Black adults (64 percent alike) to report doing at least OK. ([Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System 11/13-11/30](#))

Further on education impacts, a recent report finds that while those who graduate with a bachelor's degree earn more than their less-educated peers, the benefits of this education accrue more strongly to those with a family history of college attendance. Adults with at least one parent with a bachelor's have a median household income of \$135,800, significantly more than among first-generation graduates, \$99,600. The wealth gap between these groups is even wider, \$244,500 vs. \$152,000. That's due not only to the difference in income, but also the effects of educational debt, which is somewhat more common and typically larger among those without a college-educated parent; and inheritances, higher among their counterparts. ([Pew Research Center 5/18](#))

Employment

In recently released data from November, 14 percent of adults received unemployment income in the previous year, up sharply from 2 percent in 2019 ([Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System 11/13-11/30](#)).

Pandemic effects extend to teen employment. Thirty-one percent of 16- to 19-year-olds had a paying job in summer 2020, down 5 points from 2019 to its lowest since the Great Recession. In a sign of recovery, one in 10 in this age group were unemployed in May 2021 (defined as being available and searching for work but having not yet found any), down sharply from three in 10 a year ago. ([Pew Research Center 6/7](#))

When it comes to getting support for a job or career, two in 10 adults in a recently released study from April said they had no trustworthy people outside their household to go to for help with things like writing a resume, getting connected to someone to get a job interview or job or getting advice on a professional challenge. One in 10 had just one trustworthy person; seven in 10 had a few (58 percent) or many (12 percent). ([Impact Genome/AP-NORC 3/25-4/15](#))

Government Action

Six in 10 Americans support President Biden’s proposed multi-trillion dollar spending plan “to expand access to healthcare and childcare, and provide paid leave and college tuition support,” with 34 percent opposed. It’s supported by about nine in 10 Democrats, roughly half of independents and about four in 10 Republicans. ([Monmouth 6/9-6/14](#))

About six in 10 registered voters think the additional unemployment benefits provided by the federal government during the pandemic last year “were a necessary lifeline for unemployed Americans”; 35 percent think they “were unnecessary and amounted to a paid vacation for too many people.”

A slim majority (53 percent) think continued federal unemployment benefits are hurting the economic recovery by discouraging people from looking for jobs; 45 percent think they’re aiding the recovery by supporting people looking for jobs. ([Fox News 6/19-6/22](#))

In May a similar share, 54 percent, said states were doing the right thing by “choosing to cut off the additional \$300 in federal unemployment benefits months early because they believe it discourages work,” compared with 38 percent who called this the wrong thing. Republicans (89 percent) and independents (54 percent) were more apt than Democrats (32 percent) to think states are doing the right thing in cutting off benefits early ([Quinnipiac 5/18-5/24](#)). (This question offered a rationale for cutting off benefits but not one for continuing them. In a different question, in late March, about six in 10 approved extending unemployment insurance payments of \$300 a week until September 6th, as noted in last month’s summary.) ([AP-NORC 3/25-3/29](#))

On another topic relevant to economic opportunity, large majorities in a late May survey supported proposals for congressional action on health care affordability. About nine in 10 called each of the following either a top priority or an important one: allowing the federal government and private insurance to negotiate with drug companies to get a lower price on prescription drugs; allowing states to do the same; expanding Medicare coverage to include hearing aids, dental and vision coverage; and limiting seniors’ out-of-pocket costs.

About eight in 10 said the same about continuing efforts to make sure U.S. residents are able to receive a COVID-19 vaccine and expanding government health insurance coverage for lower-

income people in states that have not expanded Medicaid. Seven in 10 gave a high priority to creating a public option that would compete with private health insurance and be available to all Americans. About two-thirds did so for lowering the age of Medicare eligibility to 60 and making permanent the two-year expansion of additional financial help from the COVID relief bill for people who buy their own insurance. ([KFF 5/18-5/25](#))

State Results

California. Seven in 10 California adults in a May survey approved of a state proposal to provide \$600 stimulus checks for residents with incomes under \$75,000 and an additional \$500 for those with children. Eight in 10 approved of assistance to pay overdue rent and utility bills for those who fell behind during the pandemic. Twenty-four percent said they were financially worse off than a year ago, down from 29 percent at this time last year. Two in 10 said they're better off; 56 percent, about the same. ([PPIC 5/9-5/18](#))

Tennessee. In May, about four in 10 Tennessee registered voters were very or moderately worried about not having enough savings for things like retirement or their child's education; about three in 10 were worried about not having enough money to pay for emergencies; and about two in 10 were worried about not having enough to pay normal monthly bills for items such as housing, food and transportation. Roughly six in 10 approved of providing low-income families with a \$3,600 credit per child for children age 5 or younger, or a \$3,000 credit per child for children ages 6-17. ([Vanderbilt 5/3-5/20](#))